

University Link LRT Extension

Seattle, Washington

(November 2010)

The Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (Sound Transit) is constructing an extension to the Central Link light rail transit (LRT) Initial and Airport Link Segments (completed and opened for revenue operations in July and December 2009 respectively) from the Segment's northern terminus at Westlake Station in downtown Seattle to the University of Washington, 3.1 miles to the northeast. The all-tunnel alignment includes a station at Capitol Hill. Twenty-seven vehicles would be procured as part of the project, which would permit five-minute peak-period operations throughout the entire Central Link line. University Link is the first phase of Sound Transit's planned North Link LRT extension to the Northgate Transit Center in North Seattle.

The University Link corridor is the most densely developed residential and employment area in Seattle and the state of Washington. The three largest urban centers in the state – downtown Seattle, Capitol Hill/First Hill, and the University District – are located along the alignment. Travel by private vehicle and bus between these areas is extremely difficult due to high traffic volumes and the corridor's geography. First Hill and Capitol Hill rise sharply northeast of downtown Seattle, and Interstate 5 (I-5) – the region's primary north-south freeway corridor – runs along the base of these hills, separating them from downtown. Farther to the north, the University District is separated from Capitol Hill and downtown by Portage Bay and the Lake Washington Ship Canal; only three crossings (two of them drawbridges) connect the University district with the southern portion of the corridor.

Reversible express lanes on I-5 north of downtown result in a disparity between northbound and southbound transit travel times during peak periods. The University Link LRT Extension is intended to provide more reliable and faster bi-directional transit service to and between downtown Seattle, Capitol Hill/First Hill, and the University District, while supporting local land use goals and contributing to the maintenance of 1990 traffic levels at the University of Washington. The project is expected to serve approximately 40,200 average weekday boardings in 2030.

The total project cost under the Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) is \$1,947.68 million. The Section 5309 New Starts funding share is \$813.00 million.

Status

The University Link LRT Extension is part of the Central Link LRT system that has been in planning for more than two decades. In 1999, Sound Transit published an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a Central Link alignment extending from South 200th Street in the City of SeaTac to North 103rd Street in the City of Seattle. Due to financial constraints, Sound Transit identified three operable segments for implementation, the first of which extended from just south of downtown Seattle to the University of Washington. FTA awarded an FFGA for this project in January 2001, which was suspended later that year due to cost increases.

Sound Transit redefined the project as an “Initial Segment” from Westlake Station in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel south to Tukwila, which was constructed under an FFGA executed by FTA in October 2003, which was later amended in August 2008 to include a 1.7-mile extension to SeaTac International Airport. Sound Transit completed a Supplemental Draft EIS for the North Link segment in December 2003, and the Sound Transit Board selected the 3.1-mile University Link Extension as the first phase in August 2005. FTA issued a limited-scope Supplemental Draft EIS in October 2005 to address changes in the preferred alternative, including an alternative route through the University of Washington. FTA approved the project into preliminary engineering in December 2005. FTA issued a Final EIS in April 2006 and Record of Decision in June 2006. FTA approved the project into final design in December 2006. Sound Transit and FTA executed an FFGA in January 2009, with revenue operations scheduled for April 2017. Right of way acquisitions are essentially completed, as is the excavation of the Capitol Hill and University Station areas. Construction of the twin-bored tunnel is scheduled to begin in spring/summer 2011.

SAFETEA-LU Section 3043(c)(231) authorized the University Link LRT Extension for final design and construction. A total of \$295.29 million in Section 5309 funds has been appropriated for the project. This includes \$228.60 million in Congressional appropriations received through FY 2010, \$44.00 million in Capital Investment Grant (New Starts) funds provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and \$22.69 million in additional FY10 New Starts resources allocated by FTA.

| Reported in Year of Expenditure Dollars | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---|
| <u>Source of Funds</u> | <u>Total Funding (\$million)</u> | <u>Appropriations to Date</u> |
| Federal: | | |
| Section 5309 New Starts | \$813.00 | \$295.29 million in total appropriations for the project. This includes \$44.00 million in ARRA funds and \$22.69 million in additional FY10 New Starts resources allocated by FTA. |
| FHWA Flexible Funds (CMAQ) | \$9.00 | |
| Section 5309 Fixed Guideway Modernization | \$3.00 | |
| Local: | | |
| Bond Proceeds, Local Option Tax Revenues, Sales of Excess ROW | \$1,122.68 | |
| TOTAL | \$1,947.68 | |

NOTE: The sum of the figures may differ from the total as listed due to rounding.

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